

Like the Fourth of July by In_Best_Interest

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Summary:

A series of Steve/Kali one-shots.

1. Stranger Parking

Life was never safe for her. Still isn't safe. She knows this. Everyone she cares about knows this, and it's why they're all still alive, because they expect to be hurt and they're ready for it. Ready with loaded guns and sharpened knives and the force of a thought. Her life was never safe, not in Hawkins laboratories, not in Chicago, not back in Hawkins, free this time.

But Steve Harrington and his wiry arms and how the whole of him smells like laundry detergent makes her stupid enough to think otherwise. Even if it's just for a moment.

It's not like he's any different from any other person. He's just as fragile, just as able to be broken and torn apart. He's a high schooler, or might as well still be one. For most of his pampered little life, he didn't have to fight for a single thing, didn't have to fret or worry at all. The basketball star, maybe, a good runner and scuffer, but not really dangerous. Not really strong. Except for that baseball bat studded with nails that he's got riding passenger-side in his car. Kali has to admit, that was impressive. And what Eleven and her little friends have told her about him. Monster-fighter, she's heard. And since she met him, she's heard him talk about it. Even if he loses some of the time, boy's got some guts. If he weren't so straight-laced, maybe he'd have made a good addition to her gang, back in Chicago.

But that doesn't matter anymore. Certainly doesn't matter right now.

His chest is warm and solid under her cheek, and he's very careful with her: almost too careful. When he smooths a hand up and down her back, it's gentle, and the arm around her waist is only tight enough to hold her there, no more. For Kali, the back seat of a car is plenty of space - she's not large, after all - but he has to double up to fit up around her. She hopes he's not uncomfortable, because she doesn't plan on moving. He wraps a leg over hers and she curls her hands up under his jacket. His shirt is rather itchy, but she couldn't bring herself to mind if she tried.

"So, Steve Harrington," she begins, and her words cause his hand to pause on her back, curl a little harder against the leather of her

jacket. "Is this what you and your friends would call 'parking?'"

She can't see his face, probably wouldn't be able to make much out in the soft blue darkness anyhow, but she can tell that he's gone a little pink. "No. Ah, no, this isn't parking. Parking is something else."

Kali slips her hand out from under his jacket to smack his chest gently. "I know what 'parking' is," she tells him, smiling so he can't see it.

"Well, I don't know that you know. You're not the average high-schooler."

"Hmm. I think you're right."

They fall back into silence. It's comfortable, just the two of them, and the back seat of Steve Harrington's car, and then the gentle press of nighttime outside. There's a streetlamp down the street that touches them both with yellow - mostly touches the curve of Steve's hair with yellow. Kali isn't shy of admitting she likes that hair very much: large and and fluffed and immaculately maintained, similar to what the pop stars she sees on TV will sometimes have. Now, she notices it because she has craned her neck up to look at his face. Wrapped around her, his face is peaceful, eyes shut. Kali sits up and runs her fingers through his hair. It startles him enough that his eyes pop open.

"I like your hair," she says. "You put a lot of work into it, don't you?"

"Yes," he admits. "Gotta be full of myself for something. Yours is good too," he adds. "Short one side, long on the other. And purple too. Fucking nice." He reaches up to smooth a hand against the shaved side of her head. She's let it grow out a bit, maybe three-fourths of an inch now, but it's still got some of it's old prickle. Another person putting their hands through her hair feels good, she discovers, and she shuts her eyes and leans her head into his hand. He gets the memo, and brings his other hand up to smooth both of them through her hair. The long side tickles more than the short side. He has nice hands as well, good strong fingers with callouses, the indents in his palm cupping her skull ever so nicely indeed.

“What, does that feel good?” he asks. Kali can hear the smile in his voice. Somehow, even with a psychic punk more than capable of killing a man curled up with him in the backseat of his car, he manages to be smug. Bastard. She loves it.

“Yes,” she groans. “Very good.”

“I’m glad,” he says. “You’re got good hair. Time that someone got to play with it, I figure.”

“Please,” she says. As an afterthought, she runs her hand back through his hair again and he chuckles.

“Careful. You’re going to mess it up.”

“Oh, what a shame that would be. Tragic.”

“Tell me about it,” he says, and he’s smiling again. If he ever stopped. He’s got a face like a fox, with that pointed nose and chin and that sharpness of his. And a nice mouth, especially when he’s smiling. Not a pretty face, but the way it moves is so familiar, even after so short of a time, that it’s better than looking at almost anything else. Kali herself doesn’t smile a lot, but she does now, with her head held firm and fast between the hands of the king of Hawkins High.

It’s strange. He’s so trusting that she won’t hurt him, even though she’s killed people.

It can’t be avoided. That particular little fact. It needs to be faced head-on. The smile slides off her face. One eye opened to watch her, he sees, and the smile on his face falters as well.

“Hey,” he says, pulling his hands back through her hair. “Why the long face? It’s a shame to see it on someone so pretty.”

The compliment doesn’t make her smile again, but it’s close. “Steve, I just... I just want you to know that I’ve done some bad things. And that you shouldn’t approach me like I haven’t.”

Steve nods, bemused. How he doesn’t understand, she doesn’t know. It’s one thing she will admit that frustrates her about him. He doesn’t understand. He doesn’t understand the kind of things people can do

to each other. It's like trying to talk to a child, sometimes. Jane understood better. "Okay. Okay. Yeah. But you're here now. And not doing bad things."

"It does not make them go away."

"Nope. But I have a - a kind of philosophy about that, I guess." He sits up as best he can to deliver this philosophy. "I think people do bad things all the time. It's a thing. But I also think that people do good things, and that most people mean a lot more of the good than they do the bad. So just as long as you're trying to not do bad things anymore, then you're good. Nope," he adds, holding up a hand to stop her when she opens her mouth. "I don't want to know. Another part of that philosophy is that sometimes you got to throw the bad stuff in a hole and beat it with a bat."

His metaphor makes her snort with laughter. "Stupid boy," she says, through her smile.

And he's smiling again too, leans forward to press his lips to her hairline. "That's much better," he says. "Much happier face."

Kali is relieved enough that she doesn't have to share anything with him for it to be okay that some little forehead kiss isn't enough. She knots a hand in his collar and pulls him forward and down, kisses him for real. It surprises him again, she thinks, but he's quick on the uptake. Of course he is, when someone's kissing him. One hand stays in her hair, and the other curls around the small of her back. He's good at kissing: knows just what to do with his lips and then just what to do with his tongue, turns his head to get a better angle. Kali isn't as good, though she probably hasn't kissed as much. She wonders how many girls Steve has kissed before. How much practice he's gotten.

He pulls back, kisses the tip of her nose a bit too hard, so that it's squished down. "Little bit shy there?" he asks, kindly but with just a bit of a challenging edge. It's Kali's turn to flush, and only the darkness saves her from it being visible.

"Maybe I am. And?"

“Oh no, it’s not a bad thing. It just means I have an excuse to give you some practice.” And he’s back, not quite managing to kiss her around his shit-eating grin. Kali fixes that, as best as she knows how to.

It’s so different. She is with a man in the back seat of his car, and it’s warm and safe and comfortable. The feeling of him breathing, of his heart beating is something new and it’s good and right. She trusts it all - which is strange enough - even though he has a baseball bat filled with nails in the front seat, waiting for use, even though he’s fought monsters and ventured into the darkness to light it on fire.

Maybe that’s why she trusts it. Trusts him.

He’s slid both hands under her leather jacket now, and she won’t say that doesn’t make her a bit cautious. She grabs a handful of his jacket to make herself feel better, and he notices, withdraws a little. He pecks her on the lips a few times, then leans back. She tries to follow him but he’s gone too far, so she waits, impatient. “We good here?” he asks.

“Yes. Yes.”

“Alright. Back to our regularly scheduled program...” He comes back in, and Kali seizes him, maybe a bit too roughly, judging by the surprised noise he makes. It’s a little quicker and hungrier this time: they bump teeth accidentally, and Steve curls his tongue against the roof of Kali’s mouth, and she likes it, so she kisses him harder to make sure he knows he likes it.

Something occurs to her, and this time, she pulls away. Steve grumbles in complaint, but lets her. “I have something to show you,” she says, out of breath.

“Oh?” he says, uncertain. Kali doesn’t know what his mind is going to, but she pinches his arm, just in case. “Ow,” he complains.

“Hmm. My bad.” She squirms around so he’s behind her, gets comfortable against his chest. He puts his arms around her again, rearranges his legs to accommodate her better, plants a kiss on the top of her head.

“Okay. I’m waiting.”

“Ready?” she asks him.

“Yeah. Totally.”

Her ability requires messing with people’s mind. She’s well aware of that. But somehow, she thinks he won’t mind. She thinks, racks her brains for something to show him, then raises her hand into the air and pushes with her mind.

Kali doesn’t always see her creations, but she can imagine them, clear and sharp as day. She can’t see the glowing fish she puts in the air, flickering and gliding and soaring through the air, but she can see them, in their beautiful colors and their sharp reality. She knows Steve sees them: when she cranes her neck back to look at him, she can see the amazement in his smile. There’s nothing there, but in her mind’s eye, Kali can see the light, blue and yellow and purple, reflecting in his eyes, catching in his hair. He rests his chin in her hair, holds her tighter, and stares at the empty air Kali paints in stunning detail for him.

It’s all odd: the illusions she uses for him, Steve himself, the fact that she’s here at all, being so close to another human being and not feeling trapped. New and weird and foreign and almost off, sometimes. But good, she’s decided.

And anyways, she’s experienced stranger things.

2. Fire in the Hole

Summary for the Chapter:

A late-night trip with a few messed-up teenagers.

“Why do I need this?” Kali asks Steve as he shoves a handkerchief at her. She won’t admit it, but this entire thing is scaring her. Steve Harrington showing up to the house she’s squatting in at eleven o’clock at night isn’t unheard of - sometimes a boy needs his cuddles late at night - but what he hasn’t done yet is show up with his nail bat in tow, goggles and his own handkerchief tucked in his belt. None of that bothers her so much as the grim look on Steve’s face, and the fact that his forehead is coated in sweat. She’s not seen that look before. Even under stress, he’s normally been all smiles, all cute quips. Whatever he’s found, she hates to think what it could mean for her. “Steve?” she asks, with the handkerchief held in one hand. “What’s happened?”

He takes a breath, trying not to look quite as tense, which only makes Kali feel worse. “Listen, I wouldn’t ask you to do this if I didn’t need it. I wouldn’t ask any of you to do this. But... listen, that thing that happened last fall? It just - fuck, please. Please just trust me, I’ll explain on the way.”

The entire thing is making Kali jumpy. She wouldn’t go, not if it was anyone but Steve. Something is up. Whatever did happen last fall was never fully explained to her. She knows the bare details by now, since she primarily hangs around people who it directly affected - mostly Nancy and Johnathan and Steve and Jane, but some around Chief Hopper and Joyce Byers and the kids. They explained things to her: the Upside Down, the shadow monster, Hawkins lab. But none of the specifics. It looks like she’s about to find out some of the specifics right now.

“Alright,” she says. “Do you want me to bring anything? Like weapons?”

“No. No, don’t. This is just for me. This is reassuring as shit I know, but just trust - me. Please.”

“Of course,” she says.

He nods, shuts his eyes and breathes in and out hard through his nose. “Thanks. Okay-”

Steve doesn’t quite seem to know what to do, so Kali brushes past him and takes the stairs down two at a time. She hears him follow, careful on the darkened steps. Kali would never admit it to anyone, even Steve - a girl’s got to maintain her hardcore persona somehow, after all - but she’s tripped going both up and down those steps now. This time, she reaches the bottom safely and waits for Steve, then leads the way out onto the darkened street.

There’s one streetlight in view, and the glow of it picks out the glimmering bits in the pavement. There’s a car parked off on the shoulder of the road, and narrowing her eyes, Kali can see that there are people inside. Two of them, to be precise. Those silhouettes are familiar to her now, and she needs only a few seconds to identify them. Of course he would bring them. The first time he was mixed up in all of this was with them, when he was only confused and scared, instead of confused and scared but willing to fight. Kali opens the door for him and then goes around to the back and hops in. She can’t pick out the details of his face, but it’s Johnathan, and he nods, cordial.

“Hey,” he greets.

“Good evening,” she replies. Kali feels like Johnathan is cast in a similar mold as her, but that’s not a good step towards making a relationship. They’re both aloof enough that it’s hard to talk to each other at all. If left to their own devices, they sit in silence, exchanging occasional remarks about photography or something or other. They mostly end up relying on Nancy and Steve to be some kind of social lubricant.

“Hi Kali,” Nancy greets from the front seat. Because she’s nearer the windshield, Kali can see the light play across her face, and she looks tired: dark shadows under her eyes, a tiny little smile that’s much more exhaustion than cheeriness. Nancy is much harder for Kali to read than Johnathan: she’s sweet, but Kali also gets a sense of viciousness from her like a wolf, or something equally big and mean

and ferocious. Maybe on the streets it would be odd, but it's a combination out of place in a girl from the suburbs.

"Hello," she replies, as Steve gets in the car and shuts the door behind him. He turns the key in the ignition, and the car chugs into life. Gravel growls under the wheels as he turns out onto the road and sets off, heading out of town.

It's a bit before he begins to talk. Kali lets him have as much time as he wants. Whatever it was that got him so shaken up isn't to be rushed: she knows from personal experience. He'll talk to them when he's ready. And he does: uncertain, faltering, but he starts talking.

"So... uh, last fall. This all kind of happened before, but it was worse this time around. And this time around, there were tunnels underneath the town, and me and the kids ended up going down there, with all of the demodogs and everything, and I just need to make sure everything down there is dead sometimes, you know?"

Kali turns this over in her head. "How can the tunnels be alive?" she asks. She isn't sure she wants to know.

"It's a superorganism," Nancy says. "The tunnels are part of it. You'll see. It's all dead now, but you can still see it. Kind of how it grew."

Kali nods. "I understand," she says, though she doesn't.

They drive on in silence, the lights on the side of the road striping the asphalt with patches of illumination. Every now and then, a car passes them in the opposite direction, but they're fleeting, gone in seconds, leaving them alone to the spot their headlights catch and the dark around them. Even at night, with the rocking of the car lulling them, Kali can tell that not one of the others is drowsy. It's hard to get sleepy when you're worried that every shadow has teeth.

They finally pull off, and Kali peers out the window. It's a pumpkin farm, or it used to be, judging by the sign. There's not much left there anymore, though: the pumpkins have been driven out by grass and a speckling of low-lying shrubs. Steve shuts off the car, and they all pile out, still silent. Kali follows right behind Steve, navigating by what little is visible and by the crunching his feet makes on the

organic litter in the field.

It's the ring of dirt that she sees first, and then the hole, and then, when she crests the top of the dirt and looks down, she can see the hole within the hole, a dark spot. It's begun to fall in to whatever is below. Steve has clambered down and is lowering his legs into the hole. Kali makes to follow him, but someone puts a hand on her shoulder, stops her. Kali starts, looks around. It's Nancy, her coat tucked up around her to keep warm.

"You shouldn't follow him down there," she says. "He's always needed to do it alone - always wanted to do it alone."

Kali steps back. "What does he do?"

"He makes sure that whatever is down there is dead." Nancy shrugs. "Just how he deals, you know. We all do it differently. Johnny takes pictures."

"And you topple government institutions," Kali says.

Nancy smiles despite herself, covers it with a hand, links her arm through Johnathan's. He seems like he's only partially paying attention: his eyes are fixed on the dark hole below, seeming to wait for something. "We both did that," she says.

"But you were the ringleader, I believe."

Johnathan shakes himself out of whatever trance he's in to give a tight little grin, nod confirmation. "Yeah, her idea, one-hundred percent of that way. I'm not that absolutely nuts."

Kali nods, lips puckered together. "I owe you thanks, then," she says to Nancy. "For doing what I couldn't."

"Hey, you got a couple of them, right?" Nancy asks.

"Yes."

"Well then, thank you as well."

Kali tilts her head. She doesn't quite get Nancy's drift. "For?"

“Giving those bastards a little bit of hell that we couldn’t.”

That fire burns so hot in Nancy’s eyes and in her voice that Kali is impressed. Johnathan shifts on her arm. Kali wonders if he’s scared, sometimes, that that fire will burn him as well as anyone in the path of his girlfriend. “It was my pleasure, believe me.”

“You know, that’s what’s so good about you. You get it,” Nancy says. “You really know. Really, really know.”

“Oh, I know everything,” Kali says. “I wish I’d gone on record for that story of yours. I’ve got enough dirt to bury them alive.”

“I’ll bet you do,” Nancy says with feeling. Then, recovering herself, she adds, “But we’d probably have needed to water it down anyway.”

Johnathan grins a little, tired grin. “Yeah, I think the public might have not quite believed the psychic part.”

Kali shrugs. “Oh well. You cleared them out well enough with your toxic gas.”

“They should have known the full truth, but it did the job, yeah,” Johnathan says.

She would have replied, but just about then, Steve clambers up from the hole, noticeably dirtier than before. He dusts himself off, then pulls down his handkerchief from his face and pulls a lighter out of his pocket. “You want to do the honors?” he asks, holding it out to Kali. “Just light the damn thing up and throw it into the hole. That’s all.”

Kali takes the lighter, looks up at him. “Lighting fires now, are we? Didn’t take you for an arsonist?”

“You gonna burn those tunnels clean or what?” he asks. Kali flicks the lighter, watches the flame weave in the breeze that’s started up.

“Yeah,” she says, and tosses it into the hole.

FWOOOSH.

The orange light of fire lights up the hole, glows off the smoke that begins to stream out steadily. Steve watches it burn, a hand pushed back into his hair. He looks wiped-out, but satisfied. Whatever happened down there, Kali hopes the fire cleans it out of his mind. With Nancy and Johnathan setting the example, Kali puts her arm through Steve's and leans her head against his arm, saying I'm here, I won't leave, I understand why you're doing this. Steve leans his head down on top of hers, eyes still fixed on the fire.

It's burned down to only the ghost of fire before he finally has watched it burn enough to leave.

Notes for the Chapter:

I didn't end up liking this one as much, but whatever. Have Steve lighting some stuff on fire and working through some shit.

3. The Oldest

Summary for the Chapter:

Pain for y'all, because why not?

He has the bat clutched in both hands, knuckles white, perched on the edge of his bed, so tense he looks like he might snap, one foot bleeding from an accident he had upon smashing a lamp. Kali isn't sure how to approach him. The twitchy, spacey, hunted look in his eyes makes her unsure of what to do, if she can do anything at all. She's hesitant, hovering at the edge of his room and waiting for a sign she's about to make the right move.

"Steve?" she asks, reaching out a hand. "May I come over?"

He's silent, makes no sign that he hears her except for a shudder that goes from the tips of his toes to the top of his head. It makes his hair tremble, and it would be funny, if it wasn't making Kali feel sick to her stomach. Empathy is not her strong suit, but she knows that look.

"Steve?" she repeats. "Can I touch you?"

He makes a little gasping noise in the back of his throat, shakes his head. "No - please no - fucking - sorry - sorry..." He trails off, shifts his position on the bed to be more ready to strike at anything and everything. The sick feeling has welled up in her stomach again, tight and hot and ugly. It was only chance that she happened to be here tonight, only chance that he didn't sit this one out alone again. How many times he's done this before isn't worth thinking about. Too many, in her book.

He's shaking. If this was one of her gang, Kali would have reached out to him with her powers, but she doesn't know how that will make him react. Seeing things directly after terrifying flashbacks of monsters, even pleasant things, might only make everything worse. She doesn't want him to start taking swings with his bat, since he already took out his lamp when the flashback first hit. It now lies shattered on the ground, spots of blood leading to his right foot. There's a small pool of blood forming on the ground around his foot.

“Is there anything that would help?” she asks him.

Steve shakes his head, quick, jittery. “No. Not really. Shit. Fuck - shit - goddamn it all-” He breaks off, sniffs.

It’s a waiting game then. She leans against the wall, eyes still on him. “I understand,” she says. “That you don’t feel safe. That you can probably never feel safe again. No one would. But there’s nothing here now. Just ghosts.”

He nods once. Short and abrupt and stiff. Kali is silent now, picking up the details. The sheets of his bed are a twisted, tangled mess: apparently, he had been lying in bed when it happened, and had twisted upright to grab his bat and start taking swings. The bat, stored under the bed, left scratches on the floor when he whipped it out. The closet light picks out part of their surroundings, and the blue glow of the pool through the window picks out more. It’s quiet, except for the sound of Steve’s ragged breathing, slowly getting slower and slower as he forces himself to calm down.

“We set a trap for the damn thing,” he starts unexpectedly, and Kali looks up. “We set a trap, and we barricaded up an old bus, and we made gasoline trails on the ground and waited for dark for them to come out and get chunks of beef we used as bait. Fucking monsters - literal fucking monsters and twelve-year-olds or however old those shitheads are fighting them off - and I was the adult. I was the adult. And I got out there to fight them - stupid - stupid, stupid, stupid - and it was cool and all but they could have killed me, they could have killed me and then those things would have gotten to the kids and killed them too - everyone would have died - god, they’re all just kids and they’re already mixed up in so much- and they were on the roof and you can’t let the damn thing get down into the bus - you just finish with the ones at the bus door and then there’s one that’s going to jump down on you and get inside like that and kill everyone - and eat you - and I - I-” He falters.

“You talk about these kids like you weren’t one,” Kali murmurs. “Like would ever be any better because you were older.”

He makes a ragged noise. “I was the responsible one. And I should have told them to go home - to leave it all the fuck alone - but do the

little bastards listen? Would they have gone? No - no - no - what if they had-? What if I hadn't-?"

"It wasn't your fault, Steve," she tells him.

"It wasn't - wasn't - it wasn't my damn fault." The bat slips in his limp hands and thuds into the floorboards between his legs, the nails digging in deep. He covers his face with both hands, and Kali thinks that perhaps it's time to try again.

"Can I touch you?" she asks him.

"Please - please-"

Kali moves over, quiet as a cat, and sits down next to him, pulls his head into her lap, strokes his arm and his back while he hiccups and keeps hiding his face in his hands. "It was terrible," she tells him. "But you've survived. And they're gone. All of those things are gone."

He nods, and Kali goes back to holding him as he rides out the fear of ghostly monsters, breath finally settling into something like normal, finally not stiff. People can't solve everything, and she's no exception, she knows what. What she hopes is that he feels some of the safety in her arms as she feels in his.

Finally, he's breathing like normal again, and Kali leans down and gives his cheek a peck. "Let's go get your foot cleaned up," she tells him. He stays where he is for a moment, then nods, a little dulled by tiredness.

"Okay."

Kali sits him upright then pulls him to his feet, and together they head for the bathroom, Steve still dripping blood on the floorboards from his cut foot.

Notes for the Chapter:

Traumatized Steve, because I don't think that most of the fanfic I've seen has touched on it enough. This guy might not have seen all that some of the other characters have, but if I was in his position, lordy

lord.

4. Senior Prom, 1985

Summary for the Chapter:

Prom can be a nerve-wracking experience, especially if you've been taught all your life to fear death and attacks and people in general.

Steve didn't think that it was possible for someone to look that good. Sure, Nancy - and even Johnathan he'll admit to himself - he thought might have been up there, but he was wrong.

Since Kali prefers to keep a low profile, he thought it was likely she wouldn't show up. Senior prom isn't a good place for low profile, and with so many people, and with so much happening, he's surprised she showed up. But she's here, hair done, makeup applied perfectly. She still looks punk as hell, though it's the first time he's seen her in a dress. It's purple. Pruple and frilly. A much stronger man. He comes to his senses just in time to stop himself from dropping his cup full of punch. For fuck's sake.

He makes a wheezing noise as she approaches, then finds his voice. "Hey," he says, going for the winning smile. It probably just looks strained. "You look really good. I'm a lucky guy."

Kali smiles, but it's strained as well. She's not comfortable in the dress, or in those heels. Time to fix that.

"There's an entire dance floor out there. I think we should get out on it," he tells her, jerking a thumb towards the dance floor. "Come on, you won't have to dance with anyone else but me," he adds, seeing her uncertainty.

"I don't know how to dance, Steve," she tells him. She shifts in her heels, more uncomfortable. "I would probably step on your feet."

"Oh, come on. I don't mind. I'll lead. You just follow. Come on," he adds, taking her hand and leading her after him. "No one's looking at you, promise." She draws up when he does, looking at him expectantly. "Alright," he says, curling his fingers into hers. "So these

normally go up here, like this, but it doesn't really matter what you do with them. Then this hand here is supposed to go on my shoulder, and I put this one on your waist, and then we just... sway. There we go. See? You learned how to dance your first dance."

"What is this one?" she asks. Even though she's not comfortable, even now, she's relaxed a bit under his hand, so close to him.

"A waltz. Maybe. I think the song has to have a certain beat, but that's what the music nerds are for. I don't need to know about that."

Kali smiles, a real smile. Her teeth gleam bright in the gleam of the lights, against the deep brown of her lips. "Mmm, because all you need to know about is basketball."

"Exactly," he says. "Basketball, and also-" He lowers his voice and leans forward to whisper it in her ear, "-how to beat monsters with a fucking baseball bat."

Her smile is wider, curls the corners of her mouth up so nicely, so mischievously. "That's the kind of talk I like to hear from you."

"Well, I'm happy to oblige."

They fall into silence. Kali is looking around at the other teenagers, finally relaxed, but Steve is looking nowhere but at her. He couldn't imagine looking anywhere else. Her dark eyes reflect the colorful lights of the prom, every line of her perfect. He can almost see the magic in her, like this. She notices, finally, and looks up at him, eyebrows drawing together.

"What?" she asks him.

"Nothing." Reckless, suddenly, he picks her up and swings her around once before setting her back down. Surprised, she clings to him even when she's back on the ground, actually giggling - who would have thought?

"No, I think something is up," she says, trying to return to seriousness. "What?"

He shakes his head, squeezes her waist. "Nothing, really. Have I told

you how good you look tonight?"

Author's Note:

I'm a sucker for cuddling with no strings, and also kissing with no strings.

Steve, especially with his growth in season two, strikes me as a real stand-up kinda fella, but also, still pretty smug at times. Not like he doesn't have a right to be kind of smug. Kali was harder to work with, not having as much material as Steve, but I hope I did her justice.